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Social Security turns 75

By Bob Filner

I am reminded of a promise our country made 75 years ago Saturday – a promise that old age will not force Americans into poverty and destitution.

I'm proud I can say that even after 75 years we have kept that promise. Social Security has continued to provide dependable benefits that arrive on time and in full. Over the years we have worked to expand and preserve those benefits and I will continue to fight to keep Social Security solvent and dependable, even in the face of those who would dismantle it.

Given our country's recent history, it seems almost ridiculous when we remember the efforts to privatize Social Security. But it was only five years ago when Republicans attempted to end Social Security as we know it and replace it with a system that would have instead gambled that money on Wall Street.

Just imagine if Republicans had gotten their way back in 2005. As seniors watched their retirement savings decimated at the end of the Bush administration, they would have also had to sit by as Wall Street lost billions of dollars in private Social Security accounts.

Fast forward from 2005 to 2010 and you'll find that Republicans in Washington have taken out their old playbook – and just in time for election season. The plan proposed by the Republican Budget Committee leader calls for Social Security privatization, and their party leader, John Boehner, won't take it off the table.

This new Republican plan for Social Security is just as extreme as the plan they put forward back then. It would cut Social Security retirement and survivor benefits for the middle class. It would divert trillions of dollars from the Social Security Trust Fund into private accounts and subject

worker's basic retirement security to the risks of Wall Street. Eventually four out of every 10 dollars of Social Security payroll contributions would be diverted to private accounts – threatening the ability of the Trust Fund to pay benefits to today's seniors. And, it would grow the deficit, increasing federal borrowing by more than \$1 trillion.

On the third anniversary of the passage of the law establishing Social Security, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, "The Act does not offer anyone, either individually or collectively, an easy life – nor was it ever intended so to do. None of the sums of money paid out to individuals in assistance or in insurance will spell anything approaching abundance. But they will furnish that minimum necessity to keep a foothold; and that is the kind of protection Americans want."

In San Diego, we know all too well how close many of our seniors are to homelessness. I can't even count the number of constituents who come to my office for help with their benefits, because without them they wouldn't be able to maintain the most basic needs of life – food, shelter, health care. They worked hard all of their lives paying into the system that promised to make sure they would not be impoverished in their golden years.

Our state has much to lose if we go down a path that would jeopardize this system that we have been able to depend on for 75 years. California has the highest number of beneficiaries of any state in the country, at close to 5 million. That is more than New York, more than Florida. And still, some in Congress want to play risky games with Social Security – even some of my colleagues in the San Diego County delegation.



What we need to do is work together across the aisle to make sure Social Security is solvent over the next 75 years and beyond. Last week the Social Security Boards of Trustees published a report detailing the financial status of the program. It found that the trust fund was in good shape in the short term, but because of the retirement of the baby boom generation and the economy, the long-term projections were not as rosy. There is much we can do to strengthen Social Security, without going down the road of destroying this successful program.

Now more than ever before in our lifetimes we know the harsh realities of what would face older Americans if we didn't have Social Security. We have much work to do to strengthen the program, but cuts and risky privatization schemes would only serve to undermine the mission set out 75 years ago.